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A Doctoral Resume

FROM BONDAGES TO EMANCIPATION: A CRITICAL STUDY OF MAYA ANGELOU'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

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I. INTRODUCTION

Autobiography is a narrative account typically written by an individual that purports to depict his or her life and character. Unlike dairies and journals, which are kept for the author's private use, autobiographies are written expressly for public readers. Autobiography provides liberty to the writers to explore various shades of their life. It is one of the most apt literary forms where the writer can uncover the incidents that framed and formed their life. It is the reason that the readers all over the world cherish autobiographies. This is why, it seems, "Dr. Jonson preferred Autobiography to Biography" (Prasad 236). Longfellow also opines, "Autobiography is a product of firsthand experience, Biography of second hand knowledge" (Prasad 237)

Nevertheless, it is the fact that autobiographies are marked by ill-natured inclination to stress faults and raise objections. The rationale behind it is that autobiography presumably based on the inability – or unwillingness – of the writer to recall memories accurately has in certain cases resulted misleading or incorrect information to the readers. Secondly, it is taken for granted that autobiography is merely a written record that revolves around an individual and his or her life. It has nothing to do with art. However, it is spurious. Autobiography cannot be circumscribed merely to the individual's personal record rather it has universal appeal and much more than what can appear on the textual surface. Some sociologists and psychologists have noted that autobiography offers the author the ability and the power to recreate history. St Augustine's *Confessions*, Roussrau's *Confessions*, Sir Osbert Sitwell's *Left Hand, Right Hand*, Benjamin Franklin's *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, Brooker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery*, Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk To Freedom*, Helen Keller's *The Story of My Life*, Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*, M. K. Gandhi's *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* and Maya Angelou's autobiographies are some good examples of fully revealed autobiographies.

Throughout American history, African-Americans have been discriminated against and subject to racist attitudes. This experience inspired some African-American writers to prove they are equal in every way. By refuting the claims of the dominant culture, African-American writers attempt to subvert the literary and power traditions of the United States. In producing their own literature, African-Americans are able to establish their own literary traditions devoid of the white intellectual filter.

Maya Angelou became known to the world as one of the prominent African-American voices due to her autobiographies which try to break the cage of social discrimination, racism and inequality. In present research an attempt would be made to examine Maya Angelou's all seven autobiographies depicting different phases of her life to focus on wickedness of society, the sufferings of African-Americans and their efforts to sing out of the cage and her journey from bondages to emancipation. In order to understand the suffering and the tolerance of African-American people, especially women, the present research work propose to analyze all the seven autobiographies of Maya Angelou.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The present research work will attempt to achieve the following aims and objectives:

I. To analyze social discrimination, identity crises, racism, motherhood, social inequality and struggle of Maya Angelou as reflected in her autobiographies.

II. To examine African-American woman's restricted and suffocated life in the white nation and making a way toward equality and dignity.

III. To focus on the African-American sensibility and painful poignant childhood of the author.

IV. To explore African and African-American identities in America.

V. To study the new ways about woman's lives in a male dominated society.

VI. To demonstrate the fractured identity of young black woman struggling for economic and emotional security.

VII. To study Maya Angelou's autobiographies in defense of black culture.

VIII. To study Maya Angelou's transformation from an obscure black woman to the well known African-American writer.

IX. To prove the Angelou's autobiographies as a strong voice of African-American people.

III. HYPOTHESIS

The present study is based on the following hypothesis:

i. The thematic dimensions of her autobiographies are rested on her pains and suffering.

ii. Maya Angelou's all seven autobiographies are epitome of her willpower to fight against white society and its evils.

iii. Maya Angelou's all seven autobiographies tell the story of a woman's struggle of breaking the cage of racial discrimination.

iv. The roots of suffering and injustice of the writer are seen in her being as a black woman in white nation.

v. Maya Angelou's autobiographies represent the ethno-genesis of 20th century black female consciousness.

vi. The author is humiliated on social, economical, political, racial and cultural grounds.

vii. The writer celebrates education, racial freedom, equality, motherhood and womanist values through her exception struggle.

viii. The series of seven autobiographies presents Maya Angelou's journey from an obscure African-American woman to a prominent and well-known African-American writer.

IV. *FROM BONDAGES TO EMANCIPATION: A CRITICAL STUDY OF MAYA ANGELOU'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES*

In the first volume of her autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970), Maya Angelou shares her experience of growing up as a poor black female in the segregated rural South America. Throughout her life career, she has continued to draw on her own experience as the subject matter of her work. She has published six more volumes of her personal narrative showing how she was able to overcome obstacles posed by her race and gender to achieve success in many areas. In *Gather Together in My Name* (1974), Angelou writes about a difficult period in her life, a time when she was forced to work at menial jobs to support herself and her son. In *Singin' and Swingin' and Getting' Merry Like Christmas*

(1976), she describes her life as a dancer and actress. The next two volumes, *The Heart of a Woman* (1981) and *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* (1986), deal with Angelou's rising career. *A Song Flung Up to Heaven* (2002) deals with Angelou's trip from Accra, Ghana, where she had lived for the past four years back to the United States. Two calamitous events frame the begging and end of the book – the assassinations of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. *Mom & Me & Mom* (2013) is the final book in Maya Angelou's series of autobiographies. It focuses her relationship with her mother.

Maya Angelou's firsthand knowledge of the harmful effects of racism led her to become a political activist, working for civil rights and for a wider understanding of the African-American culture. In the first volume of her autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya Angelou evokes and portrait authentically of what it was like to be black, poor and female in the segregated South during the 1930's. As she relates her personal narrative, she reveals herself as a strong determined black woman who can overcome who struggles to support their children, while maintaining a positive outlook on life. As she reveals the problems and challenges she has faced, she casts light on the lives of other black people, providing an insight into the quality of their lives.

V. TENTATIVE CHAPTER SCHEME

This research tentatively proposes to follow the chapter scheme given below:

Preface and Acknowledgement

Chapter- I : Introduction

Chapter- II : Inching Toward Freedom in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

Chapter- III : The Quest for Identity in *Gather Together in My Name*

Chapter- IV : Journey Toward Progression in *Singin' and Swingin' and Getting'Merry Like Christmas*

Chapter- V : Joys and Burdens of Being a Black Mother in *The Heart of a Woman*

Chapter- VI : Nostalgia for Home in *All God's Children Need Traveling shoes*

Chapter- VII : A Voyage into the Self in *A Song Flung Up to Heaven*

Chapter- VIII : Reconciliation with Mother in *Mom & Me & Mom*

Chapter- IX : Conclusion

A Select Bibliography

The first chapter will make the survey of a new era in Black consciousness with its rehearsal of black femininity and the dignity of southern black lives lived amidst appalling racism and economic peonage. The background of racism would be studied and explained in detail with the reference of autobiographies of Maya Angelou. Further, the term autobiography would be explicitly explained and a broad survey of African-American autobiographies and place Maya Angelou would be studied and how these autobiographies reveal the humiliation of African-American women would be examined. This chapter also proposes to study the sufferings of Maya as a young black woman struggling for economic and emotional security in segregated post–World War II America. Maya Angelou's struggle for economic and emotional security would be studied in brief. Apart from this, her quest for personal identity and self-definition in the white dominating society would be noted carefully.

In the second chapter, a close study of Maya Angelou's first autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird* Sings (1970) would be done. In it, recollections and adult understanding of Maya Angelou's growing up as a black female in America woluld be studied. Her presentation of new ways about women's lives in male dominated society helps us to understand her inching toward freedom.

In the third chapter, a close study of Maya Angelou's second autobiography *Gather Together in My Name* (1974) would be undertaken and Maya Angelou's life in the white-dominated society of the US following the Second World War would be examined. Her quest for identity would be examined through her struggle where she goes through a verity of jobs and relationships to find her place in the world.

In the forth chapter, a close study of Maya Angelou's third autobiography *Singin' and Swingin' and Getting' Merry Like Christmas* (1976) would be done which deals with the writer's married life, her journey to various counties to establish the career on the stage and regularly encountering mainstream white racism. As a Black American, her travels around the world put her in contact with many nationalities and classes, which expand her experiences beyond her familiar circle of community and family, and complicate her understanding of race relations. Maya Angelou changes her name from Marguerite Johnson

to Maya Angelou for professional reasons. Her young son changes his name as well, from Clyde to Guy. These all minute details would be scrutinized.

The fifth chapter proposes to study Maya Angelou's fourth autobiography *The Heart of a Woman* (1981). The book dwells on Maya Angelou's relationship with her teenage son and the meaning and the responsibility of motherhood. It also deals with her increasingly political activeness and life changing meetings with the leading figures such as James Baldwin and Malcolm X. It was the key time of Maya Angelou's life where she becomes a published author, becomes active in the US civil rights movement and becomes the romantically involved with a South African freedom fighter. These all things would be analyzed.

The sixth chapter proposes to study Maya Angelou as the poet, musician, and performer as a journalist in Ghana and as an expatriate exploring the promises of Pan-Africanism among black American returnees as reflected in her fifth autobiography *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* (1986). This book forges links with her ancestors and the slave past. It also records the history of the "lost generation" of African-American expatriates in Ghana and provides portraits of many African dignitaries in the Nkrumah era, in the midst of an African cultural renaissance. Though Angelou's search for an African identity ultimately eludes her, she nevertheless finds the accepting spiritual presence of her slave ancestors. These all minute details would be studied.

The seventh chapter will deal with Maya Angelou's sixth autobiography *A Song Flung Up to Heaven* (2002). It will analyze her journey into the self. The journey starts with her return from Africa to work with Malcolm X, her miserable sojourn in Hawaii after his assassination; her recruitment by Martin Luther King; her experience of King's assassination; her presence in Watts, Los Angeles, during the riots; and her move to New York to find her way as a writer among such black intellectuals as James Baldwin, Paule Marshall, Rosa Guy, Abbey Lincoln, and Max Roach. This book is a *künstlerroman* containing the account of her beginnings as a writer during the height of the Black Arts Movement as she began working on the manuscript of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings.*

The eighth chapter will deal with Maya Angelou's relationship with her mother, Vivian Baxter, as presented in seventh and last autobiography *Mom & Me & Mom* (2013). The role of black mother and black woman would be interpreted and evaluated thoroughly in

this chapter. This study will help to uncover the relation between a mother and her daughter who tries to break the cage of evils created by white people and their society.

In the ninth and last chapter, findings and conclusion would be drawn based on investigations made in earlier chapters and how Maya Angelou rose up to position of a successful human being with name, fame and dignity, overcoming on all hurdles, racial discrimination, hatreds, alienation, subjugation and how she get emancipated from different bondages will be assessed.

VI. RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY TO SOCIETY

The present study deals with the series of seven autobiographies of the African-American writer, Maya Angelou who has undergone the segregation in the South America. The present study would help to create social awareness about the humiliation of the African-American women and would also create an awareness of healthy atmosphere for African-Americans to live a common man's life with respect and dignity.

VII. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present research proposes to undertake multidisciplinary methods of research such as analytical, interpretative and evaluative. Apart from this, it intends to use the sociological, historical, political, cultural and feminist interpretations to scrutinize and explore the different facets the autobiographies. The theme of social discrimination, personal identity, race and racism, literacy and social inequality will be analyzed, evaluated and assessed on the basis of their significance in the present African-American context. Finally, the general findings and inferences would be put forth. MLA recent methodology (MLA Style-sheet 7th edition) will be strictly followed for documentation.

Interviews of the selected writers and eminent scholars in this area would also be taken for the reference.

VIII. PROBABLE DATE OF COMPLETION OF WORK

The present research work would probably be completed within two to three years from the date of registration.

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